

Entertaining Angels: #morehospitality

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Date: 01 January 2023

Preacher: Pastor Scott Johnson

[0 : 0 0] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[2 : 3 0] Thank you, everybody.

For those of you online, make sure you say hello to us. Make sure you put your name in the comments. Let us know where you're worshipping from. Fill out a friendship card. So if you have a story or a prayer request, you can share that so we can be siblings in Christ with you as well.

So sharing a few announcements. So sharing a few announcements. A couple of things going on with our mission team. First, there's going to be a meeting of the mission team on January 22nd in between our Sunday services.

If you're interested in taking part in some of that good work that DJ is leading, make sure you set aside time on the 22nd immediately after this service so that you can be a part of those conversations.

The mission team is also gathering winter clothes. So if you have an old coat or other winter items that you'd like to donate to the mission that they're doing in that regard, please make sure that you get in touch with them or bring those things in.

[3 : 4 9] Another thing we want to highlight today is that Sandy, leading our Feeding Hope ministry, is looking for donations of eggs for their next meal, which is going to be January 18th.

She's looking for a lot of donations of eggs as that's what will be part of the menu. And so that's in the bulletin. You can read about more of those details. So all that having been shared, let's move into our time of worshipping God together.

So today we're going to focus on God's love being made real in unexpected ways. Everyone knows that our area has been hit by the worst storm in our recorded history.

Friday and Saturday saw conditions that surprised and overwhelmed even those of us with a lot of Western New York weather experience. People lost lives.

People are still engaged in big struggles to overcome damage to homes and businesses. This comes on top of any personal challenges people were going through.

[4 : 5 2] Not only are we dealing with personal challenges, but we have the challenges of the world as well. But in the middle of all of this, it's still Christmas.

Many of us expected to be here on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. We were looking forward to that special time that we always have together, candles in hand, singing that special hymn.

The thing is, no matter what we were doing in the middle of that blizzard, Christ still came. Many of us know this, and we made the best of it.

We are still reminded that our traditions reflect what God did in the birth in that stable all those years ago, and it's still doing in our lives every single day.

So today, we want to remember what it means to truly celebrate Christmas by loving as he loves us. Jesus made a point of this in his ministry by how he welcomed strangers and people the rest of the world thought were undesirable all the time.

[6 : 01] On this day, we're called to remember those who feel like outcasts, those who feel like strangers, those who feel most alone, so that they too can know the hope, the peace, the joy, and the love that we all share.

So let's come together with our opening prayer. Holy and living God, blessed Jesus, guiding spirit. Grant us openness to hear your message.

And with the angel messengers above us, among us, and within us, we sing.

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

I can feel his mighty power and his grace.

[7 : 22] I can hear the brush of angels' wings. I see glory on each face.

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

It's good to see all of you this morning. Happy New Year. Happy New Year to everyone online. We are going to take a little spiritual trip to Bethlehem with our first two hymns, O Come All Ye Faithful and Good Christian Friends Rejoice.

I'm going to invite you to stand. O Come All Ye Faithful and Good Christian Friends Behold Him and Behold Him on the King of Angels.

O Come All Ye Faithful and Good Christian Friends Light from God.

[9 : 03] Light from Light eternal. Lord, O Come All Ye Faithful and Good Christian Friends O Come All Ye Faithful and Good Christian Friends Lord, O Come All Ye Faithful and Good Christian Friends Like a Son of God.

Son of the Father begotten, not created O come, let us adore Him O come, let us adore Him O come, let us adore Him Christ the Lord Sing, blood of angels Sing in exultation Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above Glory to God, all glory in the highest O come, let us adore Him

O come, let us adore Him O come, let us adore Him O come, let us adore Him Good Christian friends, read your voice with blood and soul and voice Give ye heed to what we say News, news, news, Jesus Christ is born today On to last before the mountain And He is in the manger now Christ is born today Christ is born today Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice

Now ye hear of endless bliss Now ye hear of endless bliss News, news, Jesus Christ was born for this We have opened heaven's door and we are blessed forevermore Christ was born for this Christ was born for this Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice Now ye hear of endless bliss Now ye hear of endless bliss Now ye hear of endless bliss news, news, Jesus Christ was born to save Calls you on and calls you all To gain His everlasting hope Christ was born to save Christ was born to save You may be seated Good morning.

So the offerings that you make each week empower the ministry within our congregation in response to needs of our community. It helps support the work of ministries beyond our local church, and it empowers our whole church to reach out to those who need to hear the good news of love and redemption.

[12 : 54] You supported those who work hard to provide the resources for church leaders to increase the vitality of their congregations, to reach out to a new generation of disciples in mission and evangelism, to nurture new believers, and to plan passionate, meaningful worship.

These ministries happen thanks to your support. So we invite you again to give generously as we worship God through the sharing of our gifts, our tithes, and our offerings.

Amen. Thank you.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[15 : 53] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[20 : 05] Amen. God, we thank you for the gifts that you give us each day. We thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ.

We give you back a little bit of what you've given to us with humble love and thanksgiving. In your name we pray.

Amen. Thank you. You may be seated. So it's a new year. It's time to give up all of those things that have been holding us down and weighing our heart and give them to God for the new year.

So do you have joys or concerns that you would like to share today? Go ahead. My sister-in-law passed away.

Okay. All right. So your sister-in-law passed away Christmas Eve. So we will keep your family in our prayers. Okay. Becky.

[21 : 11] For all the different groups, religious groups, clubs that stepped up and helped out those who need it. Yes.

So definitely for those who came, the groups, the individuals, the people who came to help those who needed it and are still helping. And we want to make sure there was a family that had a house fire in Buffalo yesterday that lost three children.

So we want to make sure that we keep that family in our prayers also. Do we have any other joys or concerns? Hey, it certainly is a joy to be here together to be able to worship.

Let me... Yeah. So we had a flood in the church Friday and I just wanted to let everybody know that the response that was God was super.

A message was sent out various ways and the people in the church responded and came and helped. I know God was pleased to those involved and I hope that you were pleased with what happened because it certainly was special in terms of the way that it got taken care of.

[22 : 24] You'll still see some remnants of it around the church but it was fantastic. So be happy for that. It was a joy. I mean, it was amazing. So if you didn't hear that, we had some flooding in the fellowship hall in the back of the church.

We put out a call for help and we had a great response. So thank you for all of those who came to help. Okay. Let's go to God in prayer.

God, this year has been a little tough. We know that we can do things, all things through you.

Guide us on this new year. Bring our hearts to you. Make you the center of our lives.

God, we lift up those people and those families that we have named and those that are in our hearts. God, help us with anything that may be weighing us down.

[23 : 31] God, help us with anything that may be weighing us down, that we can start this new year with focus and joy and love, growing stronger in relationships with you and with each other.

God, you are the light of the world. God, you are the light of the world. And help us be those light, the light for others. Guide us in our steps and our path.

Guide us in our new year. God, help us mend relationships that might be broken.

God, help us comfort those who are sick, who need help, who need care, who need just that smile or that hug.

May we not forget that each one of us is a child of God. God, in your name we pray, amen.

[24 : 56] Good morning and Happy New Year. Today's scripture comes from Luke, chapter 2, verses 1 through 20.

In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth and Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.

She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

[26 : 08] An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

[27 : 17] But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Friends, let's pray together.

Almighty and gracious God, we come to this moment full of excitement and anticipation, because we know that you are moving among us in such a mighty way. And we come with our hearts open, having sung, having prayed, and having heard your word.

So Lord, we pray that you would move in us, each of us. Give us what you know we need. Plant a seed that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and the glory of your name. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray.

Amen. So anything interesting happen to you this week? Some of those snickers tell us, right? I mean, clearly I'm kidding around, because everybody knows what happened this week.

[28 : 34] I mean, we had last week a lot of preparation going on, yes? Everybody was hard at work, getting ready for the big day. Everybody was wrapping.

Everybody was shopping. Everybody was doing all the things we do when Christmas comes. And then all of a sudden, the word came that we were going to have a storm. And most of us who've lived around here were kind of like, okay, yeah, it snows.

It's Western New York. But none of us were really ready for what happened. I mean, we got the warning. Most of us took it seriously. But I don't think any of us thought we were going to actually endure the equivalent of a Category 1 hurricane with snow in it.

I mean, as you heard me say during the greeting time, we lost more than 40 lives. This was serious beyond anything we were expecting. And we're still recovering from it.

The challenge for most of us, though, is because it happened not only with the serious that it did, but it came together in this time of year.

[29 : 43] And there's a heaviness on people I'm seeing when I'm talking to them. There's kind of this weight, this sadness that folk are carrying with them.

There's an exhaustion that comes from dealing with this sort of thing. And then, as you heard Louis say, something else hit a little closer to home.

And so, yeah, we're dealing with a lot. And in the midst of dealing with all of this, the question kind of lands on us. Because not only is it these things, these things that are serious enough in their own right, but they happened during this particular season of the year.

And our challenge today, where we want to spend a little time, is because it happened during this time of year, what did that do to you?

Because my fear is, and I've talked to some folk who I've seen this happen to, is that because all of this happened during this week, it's almost as if they missed Christmas.

[31 : 06] I don't know about you, but how many of your Christmases went according to plan? I know mine didn't go according to plan. I mean, plans are part of what we do.

It's understandable. As we said, everybody was working. Everybody was shopping. Everybody was doing their thing. Those things we do, going through the list before December 24th and 25th show up. But it didn't happen for most of us the way it was going to happen.

Plans are the thing that are tricky. We need them. We use them. But plans are kind of what set us up for disappointment. Because we have expectations.

We think it's going to go a certain way. And then when it doesn't, that's when all of a sudden that extra heaviness hits. That extra level of frustration hits.

And that just kind of makes it more just like, ugh. But here's the thing. As you heard me say during the greeting. Jesus comes anyway.

[32 : 14] Jesus comes despite our plans. Jesus shows up whether we're ready for him or not. And if you really want to know how real that is, ask Mary.

Because Mary had plans. Right? You heard Bill this morning. We read the story. The story is very familiar. Joseph and Mary were in Nazareth. And, you know, if you follow the logic of the story.

They were in Nazareth. She's nine months along. And probably ready to have this kid around those few people close to her that were still talking to her.

That's another story. Right? Right? Because we know that Mary was a controversial figure. And certainly would have been in her hometown. Essentially since she was pregnant before she was supposed to be.

But, all of a sudden there's an announcement that says, we have to go to Bethlehem now. Probably not the plan.

[33 : 23] Now, after the journey to Bethlehem. Now, we have this image in our heads because it's kind of the story that we've been fed.

Right? That all of a sudden they're kind of riding into town. And all of a sudden Mary starts having contractions. Now, we don't know that that's true. I mean, that's not actually scriptural. But the key here is that what we do know is that they're in a strange town.

They're not staying in the house. They're staying in the stable where the animals are kept. And she has to have this baby now. And I'm sure giving birth in the stable wasn't the plan.

Now, I'm going to defer to those of you who've been through this. But how ready are you for a group of strange men to show up not too long after you've given birth?

That's the story, is it not? They're in the stable. Jesus is born. They put him in the manger. They wrap him in the swaddling clothes. And then all of a sudden a group of shepherds show up.

[34 : 41] I'm willing to bet that probably wasn't the plan. But what's interesting about that, as we talk about plans, is that those things become kind of the pillars of the story for us, don't they?

It's the stuff we kind of hang our hat on. It's what we look at and say, wow, how amazing was this? And all of it's because it was unexpected.

It was hard. It was not what anybody would have probably chosen if it was up to them. Yet it's the story.

And because it's our story, it's what we have built some of that appreciation around. It's what we've built.

Some of the reason why we look at this and go, wow, look at what God has done. Now, I want you to consider that in terms of your plans, right?

[35 : 46] Because think about it from the shepherd's perspective. I want you to put yourself on that hill for a minute. And I want you to imagine that you get the big heavenly revelation, because that's really what it was.

But on your way to Bethlehem, something happens. Something happens that says, well, there's a message from home, or one of the sheep has run off, or anything like this, that takes you off journey.

Something that would have kept you from making your way to the manger. Something that would have said, you know what?

I've got to deal with this first. Seems a little strange, because we know that's not the story. But friends, what I'm worried about, what hits me in this, and what comes up for me, is this idea that, in essence, that may be where a lot of us are stuck.

You see, we were on our way to the manger. Because that's what it's really about. The other stuff matters.

[37 : 05] The time with family. The giving the gifts. The being together. The worshiping. It all is important. But stuff has happened that has kept us from actually getting to the manger.

And if that's what happened to you, if something kept you from that time that you need. See, that's one of the things that happens in the life of a disciple.

One of the things that happens in the life of a modern disciple is we need that time where we actually, as the song says, come and adore him.

But because we had plans and our plans got shook, because things happened that got in the way, because it didn't unfold exactly the way we were working to set it up to unfold, did we miss that?

We were lucky enough to be able to gather online. Some of us, anyway. And we had a precious moment together.

[38 : 32] But again, it wasn't the plan. And if you're a glass-half-full kind of person, you're really thankful that we were able to do that.

But for some, even if you were able to appreciate that, even if you were able to give your heart to it 100%, there's still that sense of, I still wish we were in church, though.

And if that voice is in the back of your head, as understandable as it is, as logical as it is, if it kept you from your legitimate, authentic time at the manger, maybe you're missing that piece.

See, it's understandable. No one's suggesting that what we've been through is light. No one's suggesting that what we've been through is simple.

No one's suggesting it's unimportant. No one's suggesting that it doesn't have an impact. But listen to the story of the shepherds. They're out there on that hill doing what it is they do.

[39 : 49] And we talked about this during the Blue Christmas service. But given where we are and given what we've been through, I think it needs to be said again. Because given where they are, they're a bunch of ordinary folk doing what they're doing every day.

And then after the heavenly revelation, they, let's go to Bethlehem. Now for those of us in 2023, going to Bethlehem, however we do it spiritually, I hope that was on your list of things to do for Christmas.

And as we said, all this other stuff popped up and got in the way. But remember what happens.

It's when the shepherds get there. It's when they see what God has done. when they hear that voice that says, for you this day in the city of David, your Savior is born.

And you'll find him like this. And they do exactly that. They find him like that.

[41 : 10] And it's not the plan. Because the Savior was supposed to come in grand ways. They expected the Savior to blow open the sky and everybody to see it together.

They weren't expecting this poor family surrounded by animals and hay, a baby in a feeding trough. But then you realize what's God actually done?

God has shown us that love comes to us in these ways that we don't expect. Love comes to us in these ways that are not what we think it should look like. God's love comes to us in these very humble ways.

These quieter ways. These ways that don't invoke all the things of the world. but the things of God. And in that manger is the answer to all your questions.

We know he heals. We know he teaches. We know he saves. We know he breaks the power of death. And even if it didn't happen that night, it happens.

[42 : 30] And when you consider what God has done, that's the awe, the mystery, the amazement that happens when you actually spend time at the manger.

But if that didn't happen, friends, I'm imploring you to make sure you finish the journey.

whatever distracted you on the way, whatever kept you from that time, finish the walk. Spend the time.

Because if that heaviness is on you, because if that frustration is on you, if that sense of overwhelm, if that sense of exhaustion is what's weighing on your heart right now, look into the manger and remember what God has done, then all of it kind of melts away.

Because remember, God so loved the world, that includes you, that God gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life.

[43 : 56] Don't forget the next part. God didn't send his son into the world, that includes you, to condemn the world, but that the world, which includes you, would be saved through him.

That's the difference. That's what God has done. And all of this other stuff, as serious as it is, as real as it is, as ongoing and as persistent as it is, falls away when you remember that simple truth.

Because when you remember that truth, you do what the shepherds did. Remember verse 20. The shepherds returned, praising God for what they had seen.

That's how we become the angels among us. When you know that story is real, when the spirit moves in you to that degree, that's how you can be the difference maker for those who are still hurting.

That's how you become that voice in somebody else's life that lets them know there is an encouraging word. There are hands that help. There are those who know that there is a truth that goes beyond the lies of the world.

[45 : 19] So, spend the time, finish the journey, and watch what God will do. Amen and amen.

Loving God, we thank you for the truth that is the coming of Christ. Christ, for the way Christ comes into our hearts and to our lives in new ways every single day. For in this season, this season when we remember, we pause, and we celebrate what you did in the stable all those years ago, as well as what you do in our hearts all the time.

Let him be born anew in us. Let us worship him in awe and wonder once again. let us remember how far your love will go.

Let us remember that we are not alone, that we are seen, that we are loved, that we are redeemed because of him.

Let it be so. Amen. As we remember that baby in the manger, we celebrate the gift of communion that he gives to us.

[46 : 50] The Lord be with you. Lift up your hearts. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. Lord our God.

It is right and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere, to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. Before the mountains were brought forth, or you had formed the earth from everlasting to everlasting, you alone are God.

You created light out of darkness and brought forth life on the earth. You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life. When we turned away and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.

You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke to us through your prophets. And so with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn.

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Holy are you and blessed is your son, Jesus Christ, in whom you have revealed yourself, our light and our salvation.

[48 : 13] You sent a star to guide wise men where Christ was born, and in your signs and witness in every age through the world, you have led your people from far places to his light.

By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection, you gave birth to your church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the spirit.

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples and said, take and eat.

This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And when the supper was over, he took the cup. He gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples and said, drink from this, all of you.

This is my blood of the new covenant poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

[49 : 22] And so in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ's offering for us as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. pour out your Holy Spirit and all those gathered here and on these gifts of the bread and cup.

Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ that we may be for the world the body of Christ redeemed by his blood. By your spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, all honor and glory are yours, almighty Father, now and forever.

And now with the confidence of the children of the risen Christ, we pray the prayer that we were taught. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

[50 : 35] Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespass. We forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not to temptation, deliver us from the Lord. Thy is kingdom and the power and the glory forever. We ask those who are helping serve to please come forward.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

For everyone. God doesn't discriminate.

We take by intention, so we ask that you come down the center aisle, receive a piece of the bread, dip it in the juice, and return it out the side. We do have gluten-free if you need it.

[53 : 07] It will be over to the side with Scott and I, and we do have prepackaged almonds if you'd like those. So please come and feel the love of Christ this new year. Amen. beach live and look Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[56 : 32] Thank you.

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[64 : 02] Thank you.

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